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Chapter 13, Footnote 31

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20508SYSTEM IV
NSC/ICS 40425

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

13-31

SUBJECT: U.S.-Iran Dialogue (U)

PARTICIPANTS:

U.S.
Oliver L. North
George Cave
Howard TeicherIsrael
Amiram NirIran
DATE: May 26, 1986
PLACE: Tehran, Iran, Independence Hotel
TIME: 9:30 p.m. said he was very pleased to welcome the delegation in Tehran. (S)

North stated that "we have a great opportunity to establish a relationship between our countries. There is a long history of unfortunate relations which cannot be forgotten in a minute. Men of good will have a chance to build a bridge of confidence. We may be able to work toward a common goal. Hope you've seen the proposed agenda. It provides a basis for discussion between our leaders. There is a technical agenda as well. All contribute to this great opportunity. I explained our respective commitments and the process to the President. Perhaps we came prematurely, with our hopes too high. Our hope was to remove certain hurdles to a better relationship. We understand it is hard for both our countries. But we have acted in good faith. The key is in your hands. It is not easy to turn that key. Misunderstandings have occurred. We have put them aside." (S)

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2

[REDACTED] said "you did a great job coming here given the state of relations between us. I would be surprised if little problems did not come up. There is a Persian saying: Patience will bring you victory — they are old friends. Without patience, we won't reach anything. Politicians must understand this." (S)

North thanked [REDACTED] noting that this shows the value of being able to talk. "There are factions in our governments that don't want something like this to succeed. This is why McFarlane grew angry when things didn't take place as I suggested they would. He took a risk urging our President to do this. There is great opposition to this project. We have to be able to show progress, not for personal reasons, but for the future. This is not a deal of weapons for release of the hostages. It has to do with what we see regarding Soviet intentions in the region. We accept the Iranian revolution and respect your sovereignty. Some people want to ensure that our countries find a common foundation for the future." (S)

North continued that there are areas of agreement and disagreement. "What we had hoped was to agree on the direction for a dialogue between Iran and the U.S. Political decisions will be required. We may not agree this week or year. But this process must begin. It can begin in total secrecy, with certain non-political actions." (S)

[REDACTED] asked whether the U.S. can keep a secret? (S)

North said "We will try. But one of the greatest liabilities is a lack of secure communications." (S)

Nir said there are ideas on this problem. It is a subject for technical discussions. (S)

North offered to show the Iranians a device. "We can secretly put someone here. We know the Soviets are trying to find out what we are up to. We know the Soviets know a little bit about this and are trying to find out more. They will make a major effort to expose us. Our major hope is to pacify this opposition through technical measures. If your government can cause the release of the Americans held in Beirut, 10 hours after they are released, aircraft will arrive with HAWK missile parts. Within 10 days of a deposit, two radars will be delivered. After that delivery, we would like to have our logistics and technical experts sit down with your experts to make a good determination of what is needed. We need a technical survey. It must be done very secretly. However, if we go home without setting aside obstacles, there will be new obstacles." (S)

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3

[REDACTED] asked which obstacles? (S)

North replied, "The release of the U.S. citizens. You said it was difficult for us to come here. We also know it was difficult for you to invite us." (S)

Nir said that the back and forth on arms has tested the patience of the President. Hostage release is important as demonstration of Iranian influence and good will. (S)

[REDACTED] asked to hear about the U.S. perception of the Soviet threat. (S)

Teicher summarized the Soviet military posture and threat around Iran. There are 26 divisions. The military districts in the Trans Caucasus have been reorganized and improved. Exercise activity has intensified with respect to military action against Iran. The Soviets are increasing the frequency of their cross-border strikes into Pakistan and occasionally Iran, while initiating a terror campaign in Pakistan. He stressed the importance of beginning a dialogue on the Soviet Union for both Iran and the U.S. . (S)

[REDACTED] said, "there are training camps for Mujhadeen in Iran. Weapons and logistics support are provided. We are ready to send troops into Afghanistan. The Russians already complain about Iranian bullets killing Russians." (S)

North asked it if would help to provide the Mujhadeen with TOWs? (S)

[REDACTED] said the T-72 is not the best weapon against the Mujhadeen. Gas, napalm, and other criminal actions are their biggest problem. One million innocent victims. "Primary difficulty is not TOWs, though, we can cooperate with you in this area. The chemical warfare equipment is too developed. We need help curing wounded. Many die due to lack of first aid. Do you have anything more to say about Russians?" (S)

Cave said we have eight hours worth of briefing materials. (S)

[REDACTED] said he was ready for a detailed intelligence briefing, and agreed to the agenda without change. "We are ready to listen in all areas. Though we know we won't agree in every area, we will agree on some subjects. We have to bring up some subjects from the past, around the revolution. We don't need to discuss what came before. We believe that the United States Government from 1356 (one year before the revolution) made mistakes against all peoples. Our own belief is that our

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revolution is greater than the French or Russian Revolutions. There have been more changes. Today we feel many in the third world are thinking as revolutionaries like us." (S)

"You see many pictures of Khomeini in the Afghan trenches, [redacted] continued. "He is their leader. We see the Imam's picture in South Africa, Lebanon, and West Africa. There are protests in Marrakesh. We didn't send this picture in the mail. We have no relations with Morocco that would allow us to give them the Imam's picture. The influence of this revolution has passed to many Moslems. Islamic countries express themselves honestly. But there is bad propaganda against us in America and Europe. We have been victimized by more terrorism than anyone else. The President, Prime Minister, Minister of Justice, 10 percent of Parliament, clerics, and innocent, have all been killed by terror. What the Afghans are doing is not terrorism. But we don't call action in South Lebanon against Israeli terror." (S)

"We are against kidnapping, [redacted] said. "What happened here was exceptional. Because of one exceptional act we should not be considered terrorists. When we turn to the subject of our relations, there are many serious things to say. We saw past U.S. leadership trying to destroy all the bridges of confidence. We did not start confronting you. This was not the clergy, army, or party. It was the people. In such a revolution, there is no law and order. Not one drop of American blood was spilled one year after the revolution. American military advisers took all their belongings, as well as things they should not have taken. The memoirs of Ambassador Sullivan show it was a mass revolution. But the U.S. supported Bakhtiar, who confronted us harshly. We do not accept that. We did not see you sitting alone doing nothing. If there is only one other country in the world against the Soviets, it is Iran. We have a famous saying: Enemy of your enemy is your friend. You don't see it this way. Because we are neither east nor west, you are both pulling us. Neither the U.S. nor the Soviet Union likes independent states." (S)

[redacted] said. "I am sorry to be so harsh. But I need to be frank and candid to overcome differences. We have the same problem that you have. Some here oppose relations with the U.S. I am happy to hear you believe in an independent sovereign Iran. We are hopeful that all American moves will be to support this dialogue. But we feel the whole world is trying to weaken us. We feel and see the Russian danger much more than you. You see the threat with high technology. We feel it, touch it, see it. It is not easy to sleep next to an elephant that you have wounded. To weaken Iran does not mean the Soviets want Iran. It means they want to reach the warm waters of the Gulf. Our Gulf

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5

neighbors know this. We share thousands of kilometers of land and water border. If we are weakened, you can forecast what will happen." (S)

After a pause, [REDACTED] continued, "When we accepted your team with McFarlane, it symbolized a new political development here. But there has been a misunderstanding. When we accepted his visit, it did not mean a direct dialogue would occur on the spot. It is too early at this stage." (S)

The discussion adjourned for a watermelon break. Detailed discussion resumed over difficulty of spare parts delivery.

[REDACTED] said he would try to arrange for an Iranian 747. (S)

[REDACTED] resumed the discussion of bilateral relations. "Our relations are dark. They are very bad. Maybe you don't like to hear it, but I must be outspoken. The Iranians are bitter. Many Iranians call America the Great Satan. The first revolutionary government fell because of one meeting with Brzezinski. As a government, we don't want to be crushed tomorrow. We want to stay in power and solve these problems between us. We should not insist on special issues or a Ministerial meeting. There was no agreement that when McFarlane led the team it would lead to Ministerial meetings. Let us turn the key in a way that will work. We don't see the release of hostages as the key. You all must know that establishing this dialogue is the greatest challenge. China, Russia, Lebanon are easy. If you wanted formal meetings, McFarlane would have been received differently." (S)

North stated that he had told McFarlane that he would meet Speaker Rafsanjani, Prime Minister Mousavi, and President Khomeini. "I was told this would happen," North said. McFarlane and Kissinger made three trips to China to set up meetings for the President. (S)

[REDACTED] asked why was McFarlane promised there would be Ministerial meetings? (S)

North repeated that Ghorbanifar, in George Cave's presence, had stated that the U.S. team would meet with the senior leadership. (S)

[REDACTED] interjected that it had been previously agreed that North would come to Tehran to make arrangements and set the agenda. But North did not come. "We did not mention McFarlane. The last phone call did not mention Ministerial meetings. We did not agree to such meetings for McFarlane. We keep our word." (S)

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6

██████████ said the Iranian side wants to solve the whole problem. Iran does not just want to discuss spare parts. I want to state clearly, we do not encourage terror. We are not involved in terror. Even the Imam officially condemned skyjacking. We accept that we have influence in Lebanon. Many Islamic groups in Lebanon respect the revolution. We sent a man to Lebanon. We are very hopeful that we can help you and solve this problem. By solving this problem we strengthen you in the White House. We are waiting for an answer. As we promised, we will make every effort. We are working right now. We hope to get you news about the situation tomorrow. We will finish the job without waiting for the other parts. Regarding the agenda, we are willing to discuss all the items you proposed, especially where we have a mutual interest. Afghanistan, the Soviets, Iran-Iraq War, Lebanon. We are ready to discuss. We have some objections to your positions on some of these issues. I have been appointed to represent Iran in this dialogue. I hope this will be a good start." (S)

North asked whether ██████████ thought it was possible to convince those who hold the Americans to release them? (S)

"I answered you, ██████████ replied. "They're difficult to deal with. But anything we start we are hopeful about." (S)

North said if that succeeds, the other aircraft and other things would be delivered. "Can a secret meeting be arranged with McFarlane and your leaders?" (S)

██████████ said he would have to wait or come back. "You can be sure that this will be conveyed. But 10 days is so early. We believe that after the hostages are free and the deliveries completed, there will need to be more positive steps." (S)

North argued that he did not believe we should further the relationship with give and take. ██████████ got bad advice. Some of the parts Iran asked for it does not need. "Why do you need twenty radars? You should fix your radars rather than buy new ones." (S)

Nir said, "we need to deliver a system that would allow both sides to exchange technical data, advice, and information. A long-term system is required. Such a development can only be agreed at the top." (S)

██████████ said Nir was right. But North said the U.S. already knows what is needed. (S)

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7

██████████ said Iran worries about the Russians. "They have missiles that can reach Tehran, as well as high altitude jets. You can't compare quality and quantity of our weapons. But the will of the Iranian people is greater than the Soviet people. I myself have a sister with two sons who were martyred in the war. One body was not even found. Two others are handicapped. All four were volunteers. I have a young brother who was not accepted as a volunteer. He took his older brother's ID when he returned from Ahwaz. Martyrdom is great. We congratulate the family of martyrs with congratulations and sorrow. During Ramazan we ask God to let us be a martyr if we are to die. Ramazan is the night of fate and power. Russians sell their rifles and prisoners for cash. Such a Russian can't fight an Iranian. But if we try to get such technology to strike them they will not fight. Islam tells us to be strong to prepare to fight. Millions of Soviet Moslems listen to our influence. Many believe the Imam is their leader, not Gorbachev. They are real Moslems. Secret groups in the Soviet Union print the Koran and distribute it. Their heart is on this side of the border. If we put aside nuclear power, we don't think Russians will take advantage of Iran. Of course everything is possible with these people."

██████████ continued, "We appreciate and want to discuss everything with you. There is \$2.5 billion deal. No one knows what it is. Rafsanjani said officially Iran is ready to buy weapons from America. This was a very positive statement. We really find more confidence and trust in our discussions. We hope in this way we can have a general dialogue before we come to the technical level. We want TOWs, especially with technicians. Easier to operate than MILAN. We would appreciate your advice on F-14/phoenix and harpoon missiles. You know how our people face you in public. When the spare parts come on a large-scale, the public will naturally know where they come from. The Air Force, land forces, Pasdaran will see. But they don't need to know about the dialogue, etc. Naturally, after some of this movement, our leaders could meet and accept this change officially. We rule on the basis of the people. We respect our people's will. This is our policy. The people hear the Parliament. Three sessions a week. We have to prepare the people for such a change. Step by step. We need to prepare the nation. Meetings between U.S. and Iranian leaders will take place publicly in this context. If you are serious about solving problems, I am sure official trips and high-level meetings will take place. The Imam has said we are ready to establish relations with all the world except Israel. But you have to remove the obstacles. This is why we are ready to discuss the agenda as you gave it with some changes. Speed up what has been agreed. You are a real superpower. I hope you don't mind being a superpower. You have much more capability. A few 747s can carry a lot in one day. We would be very pleased to discuss our specific needs." (S)

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8

Teicher asked why the meetings cannot take place now. "Raisanjani has acted and spoken in a way that indicates Iran could benefit from a dialogue. [REDACTED] just stated that the Imam said Iran is ready to establish relations with all the world except Israel. What is the problem?" (S)

[REDACTED] explained that the leadership is affected by people and influences people. It is an interactive condition. "It's not whatever the Imam says. His word is accepted because he talks from the heart of the people. This is why the leadership of Iran is not something dogmatic. It is not a dictatorship, religious or otherwise. The leadership depends on wisdom of public opinion. After death of Brezhnev, Iran sent a delegation. The leadership was attacked by the nation for this act. No one went out to Chernenko's funeral. If you are serious, everything can be solved." (S)

North said, "The U.S. wants to help Iran so others won't attack it. We need to work to broaden this understanding. I will urge McFarlane to meet with [REDACTED]. He doesn't always take my advice. Such is the fate of all advisors." North also asked the Iranian delegation to consider whether Iran would want the U.S. Government to express appreciation to Iran if four Americans go free. (S)

[REDACTED] said, "Understanding can lead to action." (S)

[REDACTED] proposed reconvening at 10:00 a.m. on May 27 to review the agenda. "We should keep the Iranian experts out for now to keep the numbers small. Let us keep it political. We can decide later if experts are to be included. That agenda may be different. We will decide on a framework to implement what we agree to and how to establish secure communications. That will require high-level agreement." (S)

The meeting ended at 1:50 a.m. (S)

Prepared by:
Edward Teicher

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